

# E Model Senior Centers

Centers of Merit	Centers of Excellence
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## The Purpose

The primary purpose of a senior center, whether a Center of Merit or Excellence, is to enhance the quality of life of older adults. It supports older consumers in their efforts to keep active and preserve their independence by promoting wellness, personal fulfillment, and self-esteem.

As a focal point for older adults in the community, its range of advocacy activities, services, and programs is not limited to what happens within the walls of a facility, yet a key purpose is to provide a *place* where older adults can meet with their peers and avail themselves of a system of services they help to shape.

## The Consumer

The primary consumers for the senior center's programs and services are older adults, their families, and caregivers. A center serves and is responsive to all older adults in the community, whether or not they come to the senior center. Centers may define the minimum age for an "older adult." However, the ability to provide some specific services and activities may be limited by age requirements attached to federal and state funding streams.

Members of the community—individuals and organizations—are secondary consumers, benefiting from the education and advocacy around aging issues provided by the center and participating in some intergenerational programs for which senior centers may offer leadership or partnership.

### *Services, Programs, and Activities*

#### Centers of Merit

*The functions of information/referral, case assistance, outreach, counseling, education, and recreation are at the heart of the role of senior centers as focal points.*

- ♦ provide information and referral for all services available to older adults in the community and offer case assistance, directly or through linkages, for those unable to negotiate the system with information alone.

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*Include all services provided by Merit Centers with the following additions and refinements*

- ♦ use computerized information and referral system and record-keeping functions.
- ♦ make arrangements for people to enroll for services and assistance at the center that are not provided by the center itself—not just receive a referral—through collaboration with other agencies, provision of space, and (optionally) employing a social worker to provide case management or developing services of their own. These include:
  - ♦ signing up for Social Security and Medicare benefits
  - ♦ screening and application for respite/in-home services
  - ♦ receiving SHIP counseling on insurance issues

## Centers of Merit

## Centers of Excellence

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>♦ receiving routine screenings/tests to detect diseases and conditions for which seniors are at high risk</li><li>♦ and applying for Medicaid.</li><li>♦ Such opportunities exist at regular intervals and are made widely known in the community, though these intervals may vary from center to center depending on both the demand and the resources in the community.</li></ul> |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>♦ engage in outreach activities such as placing newspaper ads, distributing center brochures, and newsletters/calendars of events.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>♦ use extended outreach approaches in addition to newspaper ads, distributing center brochures, and newsletters. They may achieve this in a variety of ways such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>♦ hosting and/or participating in community events at public sites away from the center</li><li>♦ door-to-door canvassing in high-need or low-participation neighborhoods</li><li>♦ hiring an outreach worker</li><li>♦ forming a committee to coordinate systematic outreach.</li></ul></li></ul> |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>♦ make advice or counseling available, either directly or through linkages, on insurance, legal, and tax issues that affect older adults in the community.</li><li>♦ serve as nutrition sites or provide access to a nutrition site.</li><li>♦ offer ongoing activities and programs that provide recreation and social stimulation for older adults. Some of these should help further the goals of wellness and/or provide outlets for participants' creativity while still addressing their social and recreational needs.</li><li>♦ offer educational programming, which may take the form of classes, seminars, and/or workshops on a variety of topics.</li><li>♦ provide volunteer opportunities for older adults which may include service to the center itself, but also includes wider services to the community.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>♦ offer the same types of programs and activities as Centers or Merit in a richer variety and greater frequency.</li><li>♦ are able to demonstrate that they have programs designed to appeal to multiple groups in their community (e.g., men and women, members of different ethnic groups in the community, people of different educational background) and that their choices of new programming or expanded offerings of programs reflect the desires of the community.</li><li>♦ may [optionally] offer programs and amenities that are not commonly found in the Merit Senior Centers such as a fitness facility with trained staff or computer rooms that offer both classes and general use time.</li><li>♦ provide some form of family support such as caregivers' classes or support groups.</li><li>♦ provide training on aging issues to other agencies/and or the general public. This serves as</li></ul> |
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**Centers of Merit**

- ♦ act as major non-partisan advocates for the rights of seniors (individually or as a group) and a leader in helping older adults advocate for themselves.
- ♦ make transportation to the center available (providing it directly or creating linkages with other entities).

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**Centers of Excellence**

- both an outreach and an advocacy function because it sensitizes the community to the needs and contributions of older adults and the role of the senior center
- ♦ provide or insure access to job training, career planning, and job placement for older adults as well as retirement planning for those still working.
- ♦ provide or are served by an affordable, accessible, reliable transportation system.

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*Operational Issues*

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**Planning/Evaluation/Input from Older Adults**

- ♦ have an advisory or governing/policy board on which at least 60 percent of the members are older adults (using the same definition of older adults that defines the consumers of the center's services) to be sure that the center's operations reflect the interests, needs, and desires of older adults in the community.
  - ♦ Before beginning service on the board, all members (regardless of age) will receive a full orientation to help them understand the philosophy of the center and the legal, policy, political, and financial environment in which it operates.
- ♦ have an ongoing mechanism for learning the older community members' needs for programs, activities, and services. This may include:
  - ♦ surveys
  - ♦ public meetings/hearings
  - ♦ focus groups
  - ♦ suggestion boxes
  - ♦ must include at least one method that elicits views from those in the appropriate age group who are not currently using any center services or programs.
- ♦ have a planning committee to assure that action is taken in response to information identified by these methods. This committee, too, should draw at least 60 percent of its members from local residents within the consumer age group.

*Meet all operational guidelines for Centers of Merit with these additional refinements*

**Planning/Evaluation/Input from Older Adults**

- ♦ have a mission statement known to their employees and volunteers
- ♦ have an ongoing strategic planning process that produces short- and long-range goals
- ♦ conduct a community needs assessment at least every three years and a measure of consumer satisfaction annually. These activities may be combined or separate, *but the needs assessment always includes the needs and desires of people who do not come to the center as well as those who do.*
- ♦ evaluate each of their programs annually (including, but not limited to volume of participation/service use), and elicit feedback from the other agencies in the community that serve older adults.

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**Centers of Merit****Staff**

- ♦ employ at least one full-time (40 hours per week), paid staff member and enough additional workers (paid or volunteer) to implement the services, programs, and activities outlined in this model.
- ♦ hire staff members with appropriate education and/or experience to prepare them for work in the senior center, and insure that they receive regular training such as seminars and professional conferences to help motivate them and sharpen their skills.

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**Collaboration**

- ♦ cooperate and collaborate with other agencies/ organizations, educational institutions, faith communities, and local businesses to help assure the best possible opportunities for older adults.

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**Space and Hours**

- ♦ are open a minimum of 40 hours a week (with the exception of major holidays and community emergencies).
- ♦ have adequate, accessible space that meets all state and local codes and provides an atmosphere that older adults in the community find attractive and comfortable.

**Funding**

- ♦ acquire sufficient funds to provide the programs and services outlined in this model.
- ♦ seek ways to expand their capacity through such activities as grant writing, fund raising, and seeking in-kind contributions from individuals and organizations in the community

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**Centers of Excellence****Staff**

- ♦ offer salaries that are competitive with those of similar professionals in the geographic area served by the center in order to attract qualified staff members and maintain continuity.
- ♦ assure that each paid staff position has a training plan that specifies an annual minimum number of training contact hours (beyond any mandated training) as determined by a local plan developed with the staff member's participation. The plan should set out required and suggested training topics. Training needs are met through a variety of in-service trainings, workshops and seminars, classes, and professional conferences.
- ♦ have a plan for making maximum use of senior center volunteers.

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**Collaboration**

- ♦ have formal letters of agreement with other agencies that serve older adults or other documentation of the nature and extent of their collaboration.

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**Space and Hours**

- ♦ are open at least the number of hours required for Merit Senior Centers.
- ♦ either offer some evening or weekend hours or have an ongoing plan for evaluating community interest in and feasibility of such extended hours, enabling them to serve employed older adults and employed family members of older adults seeking services or referrals.

**Funding**

- ♦ have diversified funding sources.
- ♦ produce annual financial reports that are available to consumers.

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**Centers of Excellence**

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**Additional Contributions**

- ♦ may serve as mentors to developing centers—giving support and technical assistance to help another center reach the Merit Senior Centers model or beyond.
  - ♦ demonstrate efforts to better the lives of older adults beyond the services and programs they provide. For example, they may participate in research on aging or intergenerational issues.
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**Universality of Standards**

Members of the task force that developed these models were asked to consider whether there should be separate models, or some separate specifications within the model, to allow for the differences in urban and rural centers, and the differences among those in poor areas and those in relatively well-to-do communities. They felt that this model was flexible enough that centers of all sizes could and should achieve Centers of Merit model and could reasonably aspire to be Centers of Excellence. The volume of services and programs and the manner of implementing some aspects of the model may vary substantially among centers in accordance with their differences in size, resources and community preferences.

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